

Questioned Documents Unit (QDU) Blind Verification Procedures

1 Purpose

These procedures outline the method used in the QDU for administering a blind verification (BV) to comply with the *FBI Laboratory Practices for Blind Verification*.

2 Scope

2.1 These procedures apply to the Unit Chief, Examiners, and Technical Leaders assigned to the QDU.

2.2 A BV is the independent second examination of an item(s) of evidence in a forensic case by another examiner qualified and authorized in the same discipline who does not know the conclusion(s) of the original examiner. In the QDU, a BV will be conducted by QDU personnel from both the document examination and impressions (footwear and tire) disciplines.

2.3 The qualifying criteria for a case to be blind verified is as follows:

- The case is a single submission comparison case
- The case involves one examination type
- There are two or fewer questioned items/questioned impressions, and two or fewer known items
- The original examiner reports any of the QDU approved conclusions as a result of a comparison

Any other case may also be blind verified at the discretion of the Technical Leaders or Unit Chief.

2.4 A BV will not be conducted on intelligence casework, biohazard cases, classified or grand jury cases, or cases involving drug and/or valuable evidence and unknown substance cases.

2.5 When there are fewer than three examiners qualified and authorized in a discipline a blind verification will not be conducted.

2.6 The Unit Chief will ensure cases that meet the criteria for a BV will be evaluated by the Technical Leader to ensure the BV process is not excessively burdensome (e.g., the questioned item is a notebook).

3 Responsibilities

3.1 The Unit Chief will ensure:

- Cases meeting the BV criteria are assigned a blind verifier.
- When exigent circumstances arise, approve a minor deviation to exclude the BV on a case that meets the BV criteria.
- The number of blind verifications is tracked annually.
- The number of BVs is evaluated and recorded on an annual basis to ascertain that a representative number of examinations involving a range of conclusions have been conducted in the applicable examination types.
- A blind verifier is assigned on a rotating basis.
- Another examiner within the same discipline serves in the technical leader role if the Technical Leader is either the original examiner or blind verifier.

3.2 The Original Examiner will:

- Evaluate evidence to determine if it meets the QDU criteria for BV and notify the Unit Chief/Technical Leader if a BV is needed.
- Perform the necessary examinations.
- Produce examination records, including case notes and a draft Laboratory report, and import them into FA.
- Ensure that the Technical Review has been completed.
- Transfer the items for examination to the blind verifier.
- Provide their examination records, electronically to the Technical Leader or BV Coordinator.

3.3 The Technical Leader or BV Coordinator will:

- Approve a minor deviation to exclude the BV on a case that meets the BV criteria when exigent circumstances arise.
- Ensure any examiner(s) who is consulted by the original examiner during the examination process does not perform the BV.
- Review the conclusion(s) reached by the original examiner and the blind verifier.
- Determine whether the results of the original examiner and blind verifier are acceptable.

3.4 The Blind Verifier will:

- Independently perform the necessary examinations for the BV.
- Generate case records, including case notes and results.
- Provide case notes and results electronically to the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator.
- Import their case notes and results into FA once evaluated by the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator.

4 Procedures

4.1 The original examiner evaluates the listing of evidence received in each submission to determine if it meets the QDU criteria for BV. If it does, the original examiner will notify the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator to request the BV assignment. The Technical Leader/BV Coordinator will notify the Unit Chief of the BV assignment.

4.1.1 If a case meets the QDU criteria for BV but circumstances are such that a BV cannot be conducted (e.g., the case needs to be examined and returned expeditiously to the contributor), the Technical Leader or Unit Chief will record on the *Activity and Communication Log (7-245)* or FA Case Record Communication Log, as applicable, the reason why the BV was not conducted, and the requirement being deviated from to include document title, revision number, and date.

4.2 The original examiner will conduct the necessary examinations as outlined in the *QDU Quality Assurance Manual* and the *QDU Standard Operating Procedures Manual* and generate case records, in accordance with FBI Laboratory practices.

4.3 Upon completion of the examinations, the original examiner will import their case records to FA, draft a Laboratory report in FA and transfer the evidence to the designated technical reviewer.

4.4 Upon receiving the evidence and a technical review being assigned in FA, the technical reviewer will accept the review in FA, conduct their review, and ensure that the appropriate verifications were conducted by a qualified individual in accordance with the *QDU Quality Assurance Manual QDU Case Records and Review for Cases in Forensic Advantage (FA)*.

4.4.1 Upon completion of the technical review, the technical reviewer will record their review in FA.

4.5 The original examiner will notify the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator that the case is ready for blind verification and transfer the evidence to the blind verifier in accordance with FBI Laboratory practices.

4.6 The blind verifier will independently perform the necessary examinations, and generate case records, including case notes and results.

4.6.1 Upon the completion of the blind verification, the blind verifier will provide case notes and results electronically to the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator.

4.7 Once evaluated by the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator, the blind verifier will import their case notes and results into FA.

4.8 The original examiner and blind verifier are prohibited from discussing their

examinations until the Blind Verifier has provided their case records to the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator.

4.9 The Technical Leader will review the results of the original examiner and the blind verifier to determine if they agree. Results of this review and resolution of differences in original and BV results will be recorded in the case record communication log.

4.9.1 In order to immediately report Identification/Source Identification or Elimination/Exclusion, the original examiner, technical reviewer, and blind verifier must agree to the results. If they disagree, the Technical Leader, original examiner, blind verifier, and technical reviewer (if necessary) will meet to address the concerns of the BV and attempt to reach a consensus. If a consensus is reached, modifications to case records and/or results will be made and the Laboratory report will be updated to reflect the consensus, if needed. If a consensus is not reached and, in the opinion of the Technical Leader, all the BV concerns have not been properly addressed by the original examiner, the Technical Leader will refer to the LOM - *FBI Laboratory Practices for Resolution of Scientific or Technical Disagreement*.

4.9.2 When inconclusive or qualified opinions are reached by the original examiner, the Technical Leader may establish an acceptable range of conclusions. The acceptable range will not exceed one level of opinion. If the results of the original examiner and blind verifier do not fall within the acceptable range, the Technical Leader will refer to the LOM - *FBI Laboratory Practices for Resolution of Scientific or Technical Disagreement* if consultation does not resolve differences of opinion on a BV.

4.10 Upon completion of the technical review and blind verification, an administrative review will be conducted.

5 References

FBI Laboratory Operations Manual

QDU Quality Assurance Manual

QDU Standard Operating Procedures Manual

Rev. #	Issue Date	History
7	09/26/19	<p>Section 2.1 changed “Lead” to “Leads”. Section 2.2 changed “items” to “item(s)” and added “a single examination type from” and “the” and deleted “any of the major”. Section 3.2 deleted “to the Unit Chief/Technical Leader” and added “electronically in Forensic Advantage (FA).” Section 3.3 added “or BV Coordinator (Qualified Examiner designated to serve in this role if Technical Leader is unavailable).” Section 3.4 deleted “in FA to the Unit Chief/Technical Leader”, added “electronically to the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator”, “Once evaluated by the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator, provide case notes and results electronically in FA.” Section 4.1 deleted “Unit Chief”, “and a” “will be assigned.” and added “/BV Coordinator for the”, “assignment.” “The Technical Leader/BV Coordinator will copy the Unit Chief via email of the BV assignment.” Section 4.1.1 deleted “policy” and added “requirement”. Section 4.2 deleted “report results” and added “case notes” and “prepare a report” and deleted lowercase p and added uppercase P in “Practices.” Section 4.4 deleted “to the Unit Chief/Technical Leader” and added “electronically in FA.” Section 4.4.1 deleted lowercase p and added upper case P in “Practices.” Section 4.6 deleted “in FA to the Unit Chief/Technical Leader” and added “electronically to the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator.” Section 4.7 added “Once evaluated by the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator, provide case notes and results electronically in FA.” Original sections 4.7 through 4.10 changed to 4.8 through 4.11. Updated 4.8 changed “have” to “has”, deleted “in FA”, “the Unit Chief/Technical Leader”, added “Blind Verifier” “electronically to the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator.” Updated 4.9.1 deleted “shall”, added “will” and deleted “and technical reviewer.” Updated 4.9.2 deleted “and technical reviewer.”</p>
8	04/15/21	<p>Throughout document edited for grammar and changed “category of testing” and “categories of testing” to “discipline” or “disciplines”. Edited description of disciplines to match ANAB Scope of Accreditation throughout document. In section 2.1, changed “Leads” to “Leaders”. Reformatted section 2.2 into sections 2.2 through 2.5, moving the criteria for a BV into the bullets under section 2.3 and individually numbering the exceptions to conducting BVs in section 2.4 and 2.5. Added last sentence to section 2.3. The numbering was adjusted for this change and section 2.3 became section 2.6. Added “examinations involving a range of conclusions have been” and removed “associations and non associations are” from section 3.1 bullet 4, and in bullet 6 removed “To designate”, changed “to serve” to “serves”, changed “serves as” to “is” and removed “the” before “blind verifier”. Added the third bullet to section 3.2, and in the last bullet changed “case notes and results” to</p>

“their examination records” and changed “in Forensic Advantage (FA)” to “to the Technical Leader or BV Coordinator”. In section 3.3, removed “(Qualified Examiner designated to serve in this role if Technical Leader is unavailable)”, reworded the first bullet to put the clause at the end, and added the entire second bullet. Section 3.4 changed the second bullet from “examination” to “case” and added “including case notes and results”. In the last bullet of section 3.4, moved the clause to the end and changed “provide” to “Import their”, removed “electronically”, and changed “in” to “into”. Changed “for” to “to request”, “copy” to “notify”, and removed “via email” in section 4.1. In section 4.1.1 added “the” in the parenthetical reference before “case” and removed “(non-technical issue)”. In Section 4.2 changed “Additionally, the original examiner will record case notes and prepare a report” to “and generate case records,”. Section 4.3 added “s” to “examination” and changed “submit the completed” to “import their”, added “to FA”, and changed “report copies” to “draft a Laboratory report in FA”. Restructured 4.3 and moved the second sentence into its own section, 4.4, and expanded this to describe further the technical review process and responsibilities. The previous 4.4 was deleted as the information was included in section 4.3, and a new 4.4.1 was created. The previous 4.4.1 was renumbered to section 4.5 and added “notify the Technical Leader/BV Coordinator that the case is ready for blind verification and”, changed “original items” to “evidence”, and removed “directly”. Section 4.5 was renumbered to section 4.6 and added “and”, removed “the appropriate”, and changed “notes, and record his/her conclusion(s).” to “records, including case notes and results.” The previous section 4.6 became section 4.6.1, and “verifier’s examinations” was changed to “verification” and “the completed” was removed. In section 4.7, “provide” was changed to “the blind verifier will import their”, “electronically” was removed, and “in” was changed to “into”. Section 4.8 had “results electronically” changed to “case records”. “Are in agreement” was changed to agree” in section 4.9, and “conclusions” was changed to “results”. In section 4.9.1, “/Source Identification” and “/Exclusion” were added, “will all be in agreement” was changed to “must agree to the results” and “are not in agreement” was changed to “disagree”. Also, “existing notations” was changed to “case records”, “a” was changed to “the Laboratory” and “issued with the consensus conclusion” was changed to “be updated to reflect the consensus, if needed.” In addition, “agreement” was removed twice from after the word “consensus” and “if consultation does not resolve differences of opinion on a BV” was removed. Section 4.10 was removed because the information was already stated earlier in the document. Section

4.11 was then renumbered to section 4.10 and “after conclusions of the original examiner and blind verifier have been reviewed” was changed to “Upon completion of the technical review and blind verification”. In addition, “the Unit Chief will conduct the administrative review” was changed to “an administrative review will be conducted.”

Redacted - Signatures on File

Approval

Questioned Documents
Unit Chief

Date: 04/14/2021

Questioned Documents
Technical Leader

Date: 04/14/2021

Footwear/Tire Tread
Technical Leader

Date: 04/14/2021

QA Approval

Quality Manager

Date: 04/14/2021